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Survey of
Church Union
Negotiations
1979-1981



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INTRODUCTION

There are moments when it is hard not to envy my predecessors in Faith and Order who edited the biennial Survey of Church Union Negotiations ten or fifteen years ago. During one incredible period from 1965-72, united churches were born out of negotiations involving two or more confessions in Zambia, Jamaica and Grand Cayman, Madagascar, Ecuador, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Belgium, North India, Pakistan, Zaire and Great Britain. The years since have witnessed the birth of additional united churches, but union activity has clearly not continued at the same furious pace.

Nonetheless, the years covered by the present Survey (1979-81) have had their own excitement; indeed, these years may well appear, in retrospect, to have been a significant period of transition in the search for church union — for reasons which I hope will become clear in the course of this introduction. It was most definitely a period which included several encouraging developments, as well as a few frustrating setbacks, in church union negotiations.

In Great Britain, for example, union was achieved between the United Reformed Church (URC) and all 41 congregations of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ, the second union in a decade for the former presbyterians and congregationalists within the URC. In Ghana, however, the inauguration of a new united church, scheduled for January 1981, was postponed to allow for more local education about union and its consequences.

The reports which follow show that new, promising initiatives have been taken in several countries. In Sri Lanka, many of the legal problems that have beset union efforts for the past ten years now seem resolved. Supporters of union are hoping to move ahead on the basis of a new resolution which spells out provisions for those who object to the union scheme. In Wales, a major discussion document, *The Principles of Visible Unity in Wales*, has been published by the Commission of the Covenanted Churches

and sent to member churches for response. In the USA, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) has received generally favourable responses from the ten participating churches to its document of emerging theological consensus, *In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting*. Meanwhile, two members of COCU, the Presbyterian Church in the US and the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, look forward to a possible bilateral union as early as 1983.

The situation in New Zealand can hardly be called so positive. A Covenant involving the unification of ministries of the five negotiating churches was narrowly rejected in the Anglican General Synod. Subsequent bilateral initiatives have also met with defeat.

It is still too early to tell whether the Covenant proposals in England belong in the "encouraging" or "frustrating" category. As this Survey goes to press (June 1982), the Assembly of the United Reformed Church has just voted in favour of covenanting with a 69% majority. The crucial vote in the General Synod of the Church of England is scheduled for July.

Two other events deserve special mention in this introduction because of their importance for church union negotiations. The first is the Consultation of United and Uniting Churches, held 18-25 November 1981 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This was the fourth time since 1967 that representatives of united churches and church union negotiating committees have met to exchange information, seek solutions for common problems, and lift up publicly their vision of Christian unity. The report of the Colombo consultation, *Growing Towards Consensus and Commitment*, is available upon request from the Faith and Order Secretariat in Geneva.

The second event is the decision of the Faith and Order Commission — at its meeting last January in Lima, Peru — to send its convergence text on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (BEM) to the churches for official response and reception. (For a full report, see the April 1982 issue of *The Ecumenical Review*.) This decision — reached unanimously by the Commission's Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox members — ends a lengthy study process and marks a new stage in the ecumenical movement. It is unprecedented for theologians of such diverse backgrounds to speak so harmoniously about fundamental matters of doctrine. The BEM text is bound to have a significant impact on national-level union negotiations. They are complementary parts of the one ecumenical movement.

There is more than this, however, behind my assertion that the past two years have been an important transitional period in the search for church union. Part of what I have in mind is implied in the theme of the Colombo consultation — "Growing Towards Consensus and *Commitment*" — a theme which points towards an ingredient more essential to church union than theological agreement, namely genuine trust and commitment between the churches. The major achievement of last September's union of the United Reformed Church with the majority of the Churches of Christ in Great Britain was the uniting of infant and believers' baptism in one church. That union was not based on traditional theological consensus, but on what the URC calls "the integrity of a mutual recognition of well-grounded convictions". Lesslie Newbigin has written of this union that "In

a sense . . . the important thing is not consensus but trust. We are sufficiently convinced of the reality of our shared being in Christ that we can trust one another even when we have these strongly divergent beliefs and practices on a very fundamental matter”.

Past Surveys have often focused, understandably, on the doctrinal obstacles to union (e.g. episcopacy) and, thus, on the search for doctrinal consensus. Experience shows, however, that while such consensus is important it does not guarantee the unity we seek; unity, on the other hand, is possible even without full consensus if the churches have the will to live as one reconciled body. The report from Colombo is quite clear that the biggest obstacle in most church unions is not theological disagreement (the Faith and Order text shows how far we really have come in resolving past controversies), but the fear of change, the fear of losing a comfortable sense of identity. With this in mind, negotiations in Ghana, the United States (COCU) and elsewhere are shifting their focus from the patient building of consensus to the building of commitment (and the overcoming of fear) through programmes of education. Doctrinal consensus will certainly not be ignored in future negotiations! But a new stress on education, and on the local “reception” of agreements already achieved, does seem to be emerging.

Another way of approaching this issues is to point out the incredible number of negotiations that have determined to move towards union by “steps” or “stages”. The negotiations in England, Southern Africa and the USA (COCU) are all committed to full visible unity, but are moving, first, towards an intermediate “covenant” relationship (usually involving mutual recognition of members and ministries as well as regular eucharistic fellowship and joint action for witness and mission). Wales already has a more limited covenant and the Disciples-United Church of Christ and Disciples-United Church of Canada negotiations are both exploring possible models of growth by stages.

What we see from this Survey, in other words, is not so much a loss of momentum in church union as a more dynamic — and more realistic — understanding of what the search for visible unity actually entails. Union is obviously not viewed in these Survey reports as an “all-or-nothing”, one-time achievement, but as a process of gradual growth that allows the churches to deepen their commitment to each other at all levels of their life.

This point is reinforced by the report on the Joint Council between the Church of North India, Church of South India and Mar Thoma Church. The Joint Council is not a “traditional” union negotiation nor a traditional united church, but a structure designed to manifest, in ever deeper ways, the “organic oneness” experienced by these three, still autonomous, churches. The Colombo consultation discussed this and other models of union (including, of course, organic union) and affirmed that they are not so much structural alternatives as steps or stages at different places along the way.

Even organically united churches, as they readily acknowledge, are stages between federal/cooperative structures and the still-to-be-realized completion of visible unity in a “conciliar fellowship of local churches

which are themselves truly united". We long for the day, said the Colombo delegates, when *all* Christians in each place can fully express the fact that they belong together in Christ, and can take responsibility for each other by making together the decisions which guide their worship, witness and service. "Our unity must encompass not only the various traditions — Protestant and Anglican — which have already entered into united churches, but also the Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the diverse life of charismatic and pentecostal witness."

This broader, more dynamic understanding of ecumenical growth means that union negotiations must *anticipate* a wider and deeper unity. The Ghana plan, for example, incorporates the historic episcopate despite the fact that the present negotiating churches are non-episcopal. In England, the presbyterians and congregationalists discussed believers' baptism prior to their formation of the URC in 1972, which made it easier to initiate discussions — and build trust — with the Churches of Christ after 1972.

All of this emphasis on education and anticipation makes the process of union more difficult, but also potentially more rewarding. This year's Survey may not have many unions to advertise, but it does give evidence of new directions in union negotiations and of genuine growth towards the unity we seek.

* * *

The following reports, with the exception of the one from Southern Africa, were initially written by local church union "contacts" and then edited in Geneva to achieve a consistency of style and format. (The Southern Africa report was written in Geneva from materials provided by the Church Unity Commission.) In most cases, these contacts are the secretaries of the local negotiating committees and are, thus, in a better position than anyone else to provide information on church union efforts. We are deeply indebted to these contact persons for their willingness to cooperate in this biennial project.

MICHAEL KINNAMON
Executive Secretary
Faith and Order

CANADA

JOINT NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON UNION NEGOTIATIONS: CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN CANADA — UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

From 1969 to 1975, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada and the United Church of Canada were involved in union discussions which also included the Anglican Church of Canada. The Anglican Church withdrew from these union negotiations in 1975 and the other two churches, at their biennial national assemblies in 1978, adopted a new Covenant of Intention which provided the basis for the establishment of a new Joint National Committee on Union Negotiations. Its overall objec-

tive is "to seek a new visible expression for that oneness of the Church which already exists".

Between 1978 and 1980, the major strategy of the union committee was to encourage Disciples congregations to pair with United Church congregations in hopes that this interaction would enable people at the "grass-roots" level to identify their similarities and differences. This was to avoid the accusation, made in relation to the earlier discussions in which a plan of union was produced, of attempting to impose an order of union from above.

The response to the "pairing process" was not encouraging. Complaints were expressed that there was insufficient guidance from the National Committee, and the committee thus decided to adopt a step-by-step approach to union. As a result, it sent a recommendation to the 1980 meetings of the General Council of the United Church and the All-Canadian Convention of the Disciples Church entitled "Mutual Recognition of Members: an Affirmation". It reads as follows:

We who are the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada and we who are the United Church of Canada, acknowledge as most assuredly true that all persons who are baptized into Christ are members of his body which is the universal church on earth.

We affirm that membership in a particular church is membership in the whole people of God.

We intend, with the help of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to give that truth full expression in all of our practices, and we therefore commit ourselves to work towards removing any impediments in our life which prevent us from receiving into full membership all members so recognized.

This was followed by a statement of three implications drawn from this recommendation having to do with acceptance of each other's form of baptism, the importance of Christian nurture, and the relationship between baptism and eucharist.

The recommendation was adopted by the United Church General Council, but the Disciples All-Canada Convention tabled the motion to adopt and will address the matter again when it meets in August 1982. There is reluctance to vote against the recommendation because it would imply that Disciples really do not accept members of the United Church as being brothers and sisters in Christ, when in fact they do. The difficulty in accepting the recommendation, however, is its clear implication that Disciples accept infant baptism as a valid form of Christian initiation. Many Disciples congregations in Canada do accept non-immersed persons into full membership, but there are an equal number who do not.

Another reason for the reluctance of the Disciples seems to be a feeling that a vote in favour is tantamount to a vote for union, and that carries with it worries about loss of Disciples' witness through absorption in the much larger United Church of Canada, loss of congregational autonomy, and closure of many small Disciples congregations. The committee has responded to these concerns by reworking the original recommendation and establishing a set of principles which would be accepted as givens in any future union. These principles seek to alleviate the fears mentioned above.

If mutual acceptance of members is accomplished this year, the next step will be to recommend the adoption of a policy on mutual recognition of ministers. Local experiments involving joint Disciples-United Church congregations, and one case where a minister has "standing" simultaneously in both denominations, are being monitored by a committee in preparation for this next step towards unity.

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(ER, 1978, p. 253f.)

ENGLAND

CHURCHES' COUNCIL FOR COVENANTING: CHURCH OF ENGLAND — METHODIST CHURCH — MORAVIAN CHURCH — UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

The formation of the Churches' Council for Covenanting (CCC) followed the acceptance by five British churches of the Ten Propositions of the Churches' Unity Commission in the summer of 1978. These five were: the Churches of Christ, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church and the United Reformed Church. In addition, the Baptist Union, the Congregational Federation, the Lutheran Council of Great Britain and the Roman Catholic Church send consultant observers to the CCC, as do the British Council of Churches, the Free Church Federation Council, the Consultative Committee for Local, Ecumenical Projects in England and the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales. As reported elsewhere in this Survey, the United Reformed Church and the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ united in September 1981. The continuing fellowship of Churches of Christ now sends a consultant observer to the CCC.

In June 1980 the CCC published *Towards Visible Unity: Proposals for a Covenant*. The formulation of such *Proposals* (completed within two years, at the request of the Church of England) was the primary task given to the Council by its constituent churches.

Within the Covenant (as set forth in the *Proposals*), the churches would acknowledge one another as Christian churches, welcome one another's members at holy communion and recognize and accept one another's ministers as true ministers of word and sacrament (including the women ministers of the Free Churches). All the covenanting churches would accept and maintain the ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons. There would be a Common Ordinal for all future ordinations, which would be at joint services. Baptism, confirmation and reception of members would be by agreed rights. Rights of conscience would be respected. The churches would bind themselves to develop methods of joint decision-making for mission, and to seek the unity of all Christian people.

The *Proposals* were considered in 1981 by the governing assemblies of each of the Council's member churches. In every case the response was positive; the churches each approved or welcomed the *Proposals* and

referred them for regional and local consideration (though their procedures are not directly comparable).

In acknowledging its provisional approval, the General Synod of the Church of England voted by houses on three specific issues in the *Proposals*: (1) the provisions concerning existing Provincial Moderators of the United Reformed Church, (2) the provisions for the reconciliation of churches incorporating their ministries within the historic ministry of the catholic Church, and (3) the provisions for the acceptance and recognition of women ministers of other covenanting churches. The smallest majorities in favour were in the House of Clergy. They were, respectively: 67.9%, 64.1%, 61.8%. For final approval in 1982, a majority in each house of 66⅔% will be required. The Synod also referred certain specific points in the *Proposals* for reconsideration by the CCC.

The 1981 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church gave a warm welcome to the *Proposals*, but it was not then deciding the issue of their acceptance; rather, it was initiating a period of careful study and decision-making during which the mind of the church would be determined.

The Methodist Conference gave a remarkable, almost unanimous, affirmation of its approval of the *Proposals*.

The CCC followed carefully the debates in the synods and assemblies, and sought to be sensitive to the concerns arising in those discussions. Working groups were appointed within the CCC on (1) the theology of reconciliation and participation in national, regional and local services as well as the lay role in ordination, (2) conscience, with particular reference to women ministers, (3) the common life of the churches together after covenanting.

As a result of extensive work, particularly on the first topic, the Council published, in February 1982, its First Progress Report. This gives an account of its work since publication of the *Proposals* on such issues as the ordination of women, diaconal and other particular ministries, and the effect of the English Covenant for the other nations of the British Isles.

The CCC, in its First Progress Report, also explained that it had reached agreement on specific improvements to the "text" of the *Proposals* (in relation to the material on p. 28 of the *Proposals*). This "text" will be published when it is procedurally acceptable to do so during the churches' decision-making processes.

The First Progress Report has a substantial elucidation of "reconciliation" in the Covenant *Proposals*. The crucial paragraphs (10, 11 and 15) read as follows:

10. Although "mutual recognition" was a key phrase in the discussions leading to the *Proposals*, it has been misinterpreted as implying that the Covenant is static and juridical rather than dynamic and personal.

11. "Reconciliation" is another key word to be found in the Council's *Proposals*. It emphasizes: (a) that the *Making of the Covenant* is a decisive act, within a continuing process, by which historic communities are reconciled, renewed and united in a new relationship: each Church brings and carries forward into the growing unity its manifold gifts of grace and its distinctive traditions, nurtured by God in their separation; (b) that they are reconciled not by any act or power of their own, but only by God's action and through his reconciling

power, as all the Churches offer themselves to God, in penitence, to be renewed and united in Covenant together, that the gifts of each may be a blessing to all; (c) that the Covenant is not static or backward looking, because it is not an end; it is a means to go forward in obedience to the reconciling Christ; (d) that though the Covenant is a relationship between Churches, its effectiveness depends upon individuals, members and ministers, and upon their personal participation; in their reconciliation and commitment to one another, person to person, the Covenant comes alive in a way that is not adequately expressed by the words "mutual recognition".

The need both for the corporate act of all the Churches in which they seek to receive the reconciling grace of God, and for personal participation, reflects the nature of the Christian life itself.

15. The process of reconciliation in the *Making of the Covenant* is summarized on p. 12 of the *Proposals*. In penitence, and reliance upon God's grace, participants from all the Churches offer themselves, members and ministers (individually) and their ministries and Churches (representatively) to be renewed and united by his Holy Spirit to the enrichment of all, that he may give to each whatever spiritual gifts are needed for the wider service which is thenceforth authorized (*Proposals*, para. 5.4.1). This theme is repeated in each of the elements of the reconciliation in the *Making of the Covenant*:

- in the corporate act of reconciliation (pp. 16/17), shared by representative groups and then proclaimed by all present;
- in the prayers (pp. 22, 28 and 29; and see para. 5.4.1) for the ministries, corporate across space and time, to be reconciled and incorporated in a new relationship within the historic ministry of the catholic Church, and for all ministers and the bishops of the corporate episcopate of the Covenanting Churches to be united in a new relationship with one another (see para. 5.4.3);
- in the reaffirmation of baptismal promises, culminating in the prayer for renewal (pp. 29/30) whereby all present, representative of the whole people of God, make the Covenant their own.

The elements will be repeated in the regional and local services which (*Proposals*, para. 3.1.1) need to follow the national service to enable all ministers and representatives of all congregations, in due course and in the presence of the corporate episcopate, to make their personal response to the Covenant.

During 1982 all the member churches of the CCC have to take their major decisions on the Covenant *Proposals*. On 19 May 1982 the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church accepted the *Proposals* in principle by a majority of 68.89% (66⅔% being the minimum required). Following this decision, the Assembly requested the CCC to reconsider the "text" of the *Proposals* at various points. On 28 June 1982, the Methodist Conference will be asked to confirm its approval. The Conference will have before it a substantial report on the implementation of the Covenant in the Methodist Church, particularly with regard to episcopacy. On 7 July 1982, the General Synod of the Church of England will have to decide whether to give final approval to the *Proposals*. The Moravian Church will be asked formally to confirm its assent at the British Provincial Synod on 29 July 1982.

Contact: Mr Phillip N. Capper, Churches' Council for Covenanting, Church House, Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3NZ.

(*ER* 1976, pp. 330ff.; 1978, p. 246; 1980, pp. 298ff.)

FRANCE

CONSEIL PERMANENT: EGLISE D'AUGSBOURG D'ALSACE ET DE LORRAINE — EGLISE EVANGÉLIQUE LUTHÉRIENNE DE FRANCE — EGLISE RÉFORMÉE DE FRANCE — EGLISE RÉFORMÉE D'ALSACE ET DE LORRAINE

For a number of years, the four Lutheran and Reformed churches in France, which for various reasons have ruled out any prospect of forming a single united church, have practised full communion. But the reality of this "communion in Christ" needs to be verified and fostered at specific points, and the nature of the differences between the churches needs to be further clarified. This is the role of the "Permanent Council". In preparation for the next full assembly of the four churches, held every three years, the Council has decided to focus its attention on the place and significance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Under the presidency of Prof. R. Mehl, a study group — made up of theologians, ministers and lay persons appointed by the churches — embarked on a critical study of the document on "The Lord's Meal" produced jointly by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. A proposal based on this study was brought to the assembly of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches and, after examination by the delegates, the Liebfrauenberg Assembly message on "The Lord's Supper" was adopted on 21 March 1981. This message reflects both the profound unity and the real diversities of the local communities. It has been widely disseminated in the parishes, studied by many ecumenical groups (in cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church) during the year of the Lourdes International Eucharistic Congress (16-23 July 1981) and has undoubtedly helped to clarify relations between the Reformation churches and the Catholic Church on the eucharist.

Also in the field of relations with Catholicism, the Permanent Council participated on 31 May 1980 in the Paris meeting of non-Catholic church representatives with Pope John Paul II, in the course of which Prof. M. A. Chevallier addressed the Pope on behalf of the Reformation churches. (The text of his address can be found in the 6 July 1980 issue of *Documentation Catholique*.)

The Council was also responsible for initiating a working session, since become an annual event, with the Standing Council of the French Catholic Episcopate, while under the aegis of the Protestant Federation of France it participates in an annual working session with the Interepiscopal Orthodox Committee in France.

Continuing the process of verifying its unity in diversity, the Council will soon be studying the report of the Ministries Commission of the Reformed Church of France on "Ordination — Consecration", a report which really deals with the question of particular ministries within the overall framework of the priesthood of believers. It should be noted that the member churches of the Council have long practised the mutual recognition of each other's ministers and that these have no difficulty in moving from one church to another.

The other area of the Permanent Council's direct responsibilities — retraining courses for pastors — has been given careful attention during the past two years. This area embraces such issues as the relationships between the theological faculties and the churches and the ongoing training of the churches' members. The retraining courses, which in 1981 brought together 65 pastors from the four churches for a two-week course, are at last providing an answer to the need for a process of growing together and of furnishing the means for genuine communion.

The relationship with the World Council of Churches has been re-examined, with specific reference to a report produced by a French delegate to the Central Committee. A one-day conference with French delegates to the Vancouver assembly is planned for January 1983. It is also hoped that the Council can implement a programme of joint reflection with the delegates from the churches of the Latin countries of Europe.

Finally, plans have been made for greater coordination to secure an effective contribution of delegates of the churches to the many international conferences and consultations (WCC, CEC, CEVAA, LWF, WARC).

Contact: Rev. E. Mathis, Président du Conseil permanent luthéro-réformé de France, 97 Bd d'Anvers, 67000 Strasbourg.

(*ER* 1970, pp. 268ff.; 1972, pp. 362ff.; 1974, p. 316; 1976, p. 328; 1978, p. 244; 1980, pp. 294f.)

GHANA

CHURCH UNION COMMITTEE: AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF GHANA — EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GHANA — GHANA MENNONITE CHURCH — METHODIST CHURCH, GHANA — PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA

In the last survey, it was announced that the long-awaited union of churches in Ghana was to be inaugurated on 4 January 1981. The Church Union Committee now reports, however, that the inauguration has had to be postponed and that no new date has yet been determined.

Before describing the reasons for postponement, it is necessary to realize that the Proposals for Church Union in Ghana provide for the division of the country into a number of dioceses and for the establishment of Diocesan Church Union Committees in each diocese. These diocesan committees, which are in fact synod committees in embryo, are responsible for all the work entailed in the inauguration of the new united church in the dioceses. Eight Diocesan Church Union Committees were inaugurated at the beginning of 1980. To facilitate close cooperation between the Ghana Church Union Committee and the diocesan committees, it was decided that each diocesan committee should send one representative to the national committee.

By the end of 1979 the governing bodies of the two Presbyterian churches and the Methodist Church had agreed to unite. In 1980 the Conference of the Mennonite Church resolved that it was premature for the church to unite at that time, though they continue as members of the Church Union Committee.

Shortly after the Church Union Committee had fixed January 1981 as the date of union, protests were received that the date was "too soon" and that more time was needed to prepare members of the churches for church union. The Committee decided to consult the diocesan committees on the matter. A typical comment from one of these diocesan committees was: "At our meeting we gathered that the popular feeling of the masses is for postponement. We observed that the masses have not at all understood the actual terms of the Union, and have only understood it for cooperation, closer cooperation at funerals, harvests, anniversaries and other such Church festivals." Another committee spoke of "the need for effective education and grassroots publicity of the tenets of the union". On the basis of the views expressed by the Diocesan Church Union Committees, the Ghana Church Union Committee decided, at its meeting in July 1980, to postpone the union, and agreed to send the following resolution to the governing bodies of the churches: "The Committee proposes that the union should be inaugurated between August 1982 and Easter 1983, and trusts that this proposed period will be acceptable to all the uniting churches."

The synods of the two Presbyterian churches accepted the new dates proposed for the inauguration, provided the results of church union education were satisfactory. The Conference of the Methodist Church did not consider the question of the date because of a challenge to the constitutionality of its decision to go into union.

In preparation for the meetings of church governing bodies in August 1981, the Church Union Committee reviewed the situation further. The juridical position is that the resolutions of the churches empowered the Committee to fix the date of the union, but at the same time it has become clear that the Committee has to discharge this responsibility in consultation with the uniting churches.

For a variety of reasons, an August date was felt to be more suitable for the inauguration than an Easter one, and so the Committee resolved as follows: "In accordance with the responsibilities laid upon it by the resolutions of the churches on union, the Ghana Church Union Committee now proposes that the union shall be inaugurated in August 1983, and trusts that the governing bodies of the uniting churches will approve this proposal."

The two Presbyterian churches responded favourably to this resolution, as they had to the previous one. The Conference of the Methodist Church reported on two matters. The church maintained that its decisions to enter into union had been taken in a proper manner, but in response to a notice of motion from a Conference member saying that "education at the local level has not been effective", the Conference agreed to 1986 as the date for the inauguration of the church union.

At its meeting in October 1981, the Church Union Committee was greatly concerned by the decision of the Methodist Church about the date,

and "affectionately invited the Methodist Church to reconsider its decision on the date of union". No further decision has yet been made.

The Ghana Church Union Committee has been both surprised and perplexed by the turn of events that necessitated the postponement of the inauguration of the Church of Christ in Ghana. (A paper analyzing the Ghana situation was presented by the general secretary of the Union Committee, Lawrence A. Creedy, to the 1981 Consultation of United and Uniting Churches in Colombo.) Some of the main reasons for the present uncertainties would seem to be the protracted nature of the negotiations for church union, fear of change and fear of the future, and the lukewarm attitude of many ministers towards union.

Over the years the Church Union Committee has attempted to give due attention to church union education, and this has required priority attention during the past two years.

Towards the end of 1981, the Very Rev. G. K. Sintim-Misa, Church Union Secretary for Liturgy, returned to the service of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana following his period of assignment to the Church Union Committee, during which he also dealt with the work of education. The Committee is now seeking to secure the services of a younger minister who will concentrate on education and publicity.

During 1980 two educational publications were produced: *The A.B.C. of Church Union in Ghana*, by Christian Baeta (the committee's chairman), and *On the Road to Church Union: Materials for Education and Action*. The latter publication includes sections on "New Testament Teaching on the Unity of the Church", "Ghanaian Christians Received the Church in a Broken and Divided Form", and "Preparing our Congregations for Church Union".

The Church Union Education and Publicity Sub-committee has worked out a programme of activities based quite largely on the use of these two publications. It also includes seminars for various groups, such as ministers and lay readers. The implementation of these programmes is a main responsibility of the Diocesan Church Union Committees, which were asked by the Church Union Committee "to plan a programme of Church union education designed to prepare the whole diocese for the planned inauguration of the union".

The Proposals for Church Union in Ghana were worked out when the Anglican Church was a member of the Church Union Committee, and the scheme that the present uniting churches are seeking to implement has a ministry that includes bishops. At the inauguration of the church, a number of visiting ministers will participate, including "bishops recognized as being within the historic episcopate". During the past two years, the Church Union Committee has made progress in securing the assistance of ministers within this category. The Committee was advised by the secretary general of the Anglican Consultative Council that the vast majority of the Anglican Communion would regard bishops of the Church of South India as being bishops of this nature, and the moderator of the Church of South India has agreed to participate in the inauguration of the Church of Christ in Ghana. Furthermore, the Church of Sweden (a Lutheran Church) has bishops

recognized as being within the historic episcopate, and the Archbishop of the Church of Sweden has also agreed that either he, or one of his bishops, shall assist at the Ghana inauguration.

Various sub-committees have continued their work. The Sub-committee on Legal Matters has produced an agreed text for the Deed of Union which will be signed at the inauguration. The Constitution Sub-committee has produced agreed proposals for the composition of the body that will inaugurate the new church. The body will be made up of 400 representatives of the uniting churches — one-third ministers and two-thirds laity — drawn from all parts of the country, and including some deaconesses, catechists and national representatives of church organizations, as well as an adequate number of women and young people. A group of treasurers of the uniting churches has formulated plans for a smooth transition in matters of finance from the present system to that of the united church.

Two new committees have been set up. One is a Church Union Executive Committee and the other an Arrangements Committee. The latter is responsible for the preparations required for the inauguration services and is working on such matters as the design of a special cloth to be worn at the time of union.

Contact: Mr L. A. Creedy, Ghana Church Union Committee, P.O. Box 1434, Accra.

(ER 1957, p. 287; 1960, p. 234; 1962, pp. 351ff.; 1964, pp. 407ff.; 1966, pp. 347ff.; 1968, pp. 266ff.; 1970, p. 254; 1972, pp. 354ff.; 1974, p. 305; 1976, pp. 310ff.; 1978, pp. 233ff.; 1980, pp. 285ff.)

INDIA

JOINT COUNCIL: CHURCH OF NORTH INDIA — CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA — MAR THOMA CHURCH

The Joint Council between the Church of North India (CNI), the Church of South India (CSI) and the Mar Thoma Church (MTC) is not a “traditional” church union negotiation aimed at organic union. Rather, the three churches, having realized that they were already related to one another in a unique way, have sought to manifest their “organic oneness” through a common structure while still remaining autonomous churches. It may be appropriate, however, to speak of the Joint Council in this Survey since the Council does seek to strengthen the visible unity between these churches for the sake of their mission to the people of India.

The desire of the three churches for closer fellowship led to the formation of a Joint Theological Commission in 1973. It had been agreed that the relationship of “full communion” which the Mar Thoma Church had enjoyed with the Anglican Church for many years would be continued with both the CSI and the CNI. The CNI and the CSI also had “full communion” with each other. The Joint Theological Commission soon realized, therefore, that the three churches already possessed an inner oneness as an ecclesiological reality. Accordingly, at its 1975 meeting, the Joint

Theological Commission recommended a new model of union for the three churches. The proposal was accepted and the Joint Council was inaugurated at Nagpur in July 1978.

The introduction to its Constitution identifies this new model as “a Joint Council representing the three churches for the purpose of giving visible expression, in common action, to the unity these three churches already have because of their being in full communion with one another, their common acceptance of the scriptures and the creeds, and their mutual acceptance of one another’s baptism, eucharist and ministry”. According to the Preamble of the Constitution, the Joint Council “has been constituted as the visible organ for common action by the three churches, which recognize themselves as belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ in India, even while remaining as autonomous churches, each having its own identity of traditions and organizational structures”. The objectives of the Joint Council are (1) to serve as the common organ of the three churches for working towards a visible manifestation of the unity of these three churches and of the whole church of Jesus Christ in India, and (2) to help the churches to fulfill the mission of evangelization of the people of India and of witnessing to the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ by striving for a just society.

The Joint Council consists of thirty members from each church — five bishops, ten presbyters and fifteen lay persons, of whom at least five shall be women. The bishops include the heads of the three churches who serve as the presidents of the Joint Council.

On the advice of the Joint Council, the three churches have decided to observe the second Sunday of November as an annual Festival of Unity to celebrate the unity which the churches are being led to experience through the Council.

The second meeting of the Joint Council was held at the United Theological College, Bangalore, in January 1981. A primary concern of this meeting was the question of a common name. The Joint Council affirmed “the need for a name which will express the reality of the unity into which God has led us”.

Another issue of concern was the local manifestation of unity. The meeting affirmed that “the organic oneness to which we stand committed should become real at the different local levels, through participation in the liturgy of one church by the others, through formation of common groups for Bible study and intercession, through regular practice of every church remembering all the three churches in intercession, and through participation in common programmes for evangelization and social action”. Three Regional Joint Councils have been formed to promote a genuine experience of unity at local levels.

Two special commissions have been appointed: one to advise the Joint Council on projects on mission and evangelism in which all three churches can participate, the other to advise it on moral, socio-economic and political issues.

At the request of the Joint Council, a booklet has been produced containing the eucharistic liturgies of the CNI, the CSI and the MTC in Eng-

lish. Arrangements have been made to bring out regional language editions of the booklet. It is hoped that this will enable the members of each of the three churches to get acquainted with the liturgical traditions of the others.

Contact: Dr J. R. Chandran, United Theological College, 17 Miller's Road, Bangalore 560 046.

(*ER* 1976, pp. 319ff.; 1978, pp. 238ff.; 1980, p. 290)

IRELAND

TRIPARTITE CONSULTATION: CHURCH OF IRELAND (ANGLICAN) — METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND — PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

There does not appear to be much enthusiasm at present for church union among the general membership of the three churches represented in the Tripartite Consultation. This has led the Consultation to consider whether the conversations should be discontinued or adjourned. In deciding that it should continue meeting, the Consultation has felt it necessary to advise the governing bodies of the three churches that it seems unlikely that there will be any quick or dramatic breakthrough towards union. Rather, the churches need the patience and perseverance to try to grow together in common understanding and mutual trust.

Having made little progress on the issue of the mutual recognition of ministries, the Consultation has reverted to a more basic consideration of the nature of the Church. It is hoped that a joint study of common theological roots will make clearer how much the churches have in common and will put their differences in better perspective.

As part of the "growing together" process, the Consultation is seeking to encourage increasing cooperation among the three churches. One example of this is its publication of a "Church Membership Kit" for use in the preparation of young communicants. This is already being used in the three churches and it is hoped that, in some places, it may be possible to have joint communicants' classes.

The Consultation, as it prepares for a long haul, is stressing that what interest there is in Christian unity should not be lost or become stale. It is conscious of the need to encourage local ecumenism if a more widespread commitment to unity is to develop.

Contact: Rev. Robin Roddie, 40 Knutsford Drive, Belfast BT14 6MA, Northern Ireland.

(*ER* 1970, p. 270; 1972, p. 366; 1980, p. 294)

MALAYSIA

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH — METHODIST CHURCH — ANGLICAN CHURCH (DIOCESE OF WEST-MALAYSIA) — MAR THOMA CHURCH

The idea of church union in Malaysia (then Malaya) germinated in the minds of the church leaders who were interned in Changi Prison in Singapore during the Japanese occupation. Their common experience led, among other things, to the birth of the Malayan Christian Council.

In the early 1970s, church leaders like Bishop Tan Sri Roland Koh of the Anglican Church and Bishop Yap Kim Hao of the Methodist Church realized again the urgent need for union. A Church Union Negotiating Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr Yap Kim Hao, began work on a draft constitution for a united church based on the model of North India and Pakistan. The untimely death of Bishop Roland Koh in October 1972, and the appointment of Dr Yap Kim Hao as general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia in 1973, were setbacks for the movement for church union. Still, work on the draft constitution was completed, under the chairmanship of Bishop John Savarimuthu, and the document was subsequently translated into Chinese and Tamil. Two consultations on church union, one in Malaysia and another in Singapore, were also held.

In the years following these consultations, a new leadership began to emerge in the churches, in some cases replacing expatriate leaders. The task of establishing their own Asian leadership became the top priority. Some of these new leaders had not been associated with the previous church union negotiation, and seemed to have little interest in such ecumenical work. This problem of "second-generation leaders", widely discussed at the Colombo Consultation of United and Uniting Churches, has been a definite obstacle to church union efforts.

There are, however, at least two signs of hope for church union in Malaysia. The first is the founding of the Ecumenical Theological College (Seminari Theoloji Malaysia) which was inaugurated on the Feast of Epiphany, 6 January 1979, as a result of four years of consultation involving all the denominations. (The Evangelical Lutherans have subsequently withdrawn, however, from the consultations.)

A second sign of hope was the First National Christian Conference (NCC), initiated primarily by the Council of Churches of Malaysia, which was held in February 1979. About 150 leaders of all the churches, including Roman Catholics and fundamentalist evangelicals, took part in the week-long conference.

Encouraged by the results of the first NCC, the Council is making arrangements to hold the second NCC in August 1982. About 400 delegates are expected to attend. It is hoped that the second NCC will stimulate new momentum for church union in Malaysia.

Contact: Rt Rev. Tan Sri J. G. Savarimuthu, P.S.M., 14 Pesiaran Stonor, Kuala Lumpur, 04-08.

(*ER* 1968, pp. 272ff.; 1970, p. 263; 1972, pp. 361ff.; 1974, p. 312; 1976, pp. 321ff.; 1978, p. 240.)

NEW ZEALAND

THE JOINT COMMISSION ON CHURCH UNION: ASSOCIATED CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN NEW ZEALAND — CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE OF NEW ZEALAND (ANGLICAN) — CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF NEW ZEALAND — METHODIST CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND — PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND

Proposals for a Covenant between the five negotiating churches, submitted to the churches by the Joint Commission in 1976, were a step back from the Plan for Union 1972. The Covenant proposed to unify the ministries of the five churches and to continue to work at some of the outstanding problems. All five churches adopted the Covenant in principle but, in 1980, when the Church of the Province of New Zealand tried to amend its constitution to enable the unification of ministries, it failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority in each house of the General Synod. This was a sad blow to many Anglicans as well as to the partner churches, particularly as one of the leading proponents of the scheme had a change of heart and became one of the vital "no" votes in the House of Bishops. The General Synod expressed its willingness to continue negotiations should the other churches so desire, confirmed its approval of cooperating parishes, and made the approval of the Covenant a standing resolution.

The response of the Presbyterian Church Union Committee to the Anglican vote was to introduce a proposal to unite on the basis of the Plan for Union 1972. The intention was to unite with "one or more" of the negotiating churches on the basis of the Plan written for all five churches and already accepted by four of them. (Among other things, the Plan calls for a reconciliation of ministries on the basis of the historic episcopate.) This initiative proposed that any who were ready to do so should unite as soon as constitutionally possible, leaving the way open for others to unite in their own time.

The Commission encouraged this initiative, recognizing in it the far-sighted spirit reflected in the Ghana Church Union Committee chairman's words:

All the uniting churches believe that their ministries are in the apostolic succession, but they also wish to have bishops recognized as being in continuity with the historic episcopate; a substantial part of the Church has this order and the united church does not want this question of the historic succession to be raised again.

Perhaps the proposals were too subtle; perhaps the surprisingly warm response from the Methodist Church helped create an impression that this was a "bilateral" move. In any event, influential Presbyterians wrote and spoke strongly against the scheme as "out of date", "too Anglican", "too hasty". It would, they said, and many still believe, "be a simple matter to rewrite the Plan to unite two 'non-episcopal' churches".

Methodists and Presbyterians voted in 1981 and the result was an overwhelming "yes" by Methodist members and courts, a very muted 52% "yes" by Presbyterian members and a clear "no" by its courts. The Methodist Church waits now to see what sort of response the Anglican Church might make to the invitation to reconsider the Plan for Union. The Presbyterian Church will hold a representative consultation this year to explore the issues inherent in seeking union with the five negotiating churches. The future is not at all clear.

Several bilateral conversations involving the Roman Catholic Church are now under way in New Zealand. These include Anglican-Roman

Catholic, Methodist-Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian-Roman Catholic. It is hoped that these discussions will at least inform, and possibly influence, future church union negotiations.

Contact: Rev. Dennis M. Povey, Secretary JCCU, P.O. Box 27-095, Wellington.

(*ER* 1960, p. 243; 1962, pp. 365ff.; 1964, pp. 424ff.; 1966, pp. 363-365; 1968, pp. 276ff.; 1970, pp. 326ff.; 1978, pp. 242ff.; 1980, pp. 292ff.)

SCOTLAND

MULTILATERAL CHURCH CONVERSATION: THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST — THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND — THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF SCOTLAND — THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SCOTLAND — THE METHODIST CHURCH IN SCOTLAND — THE UNITED FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Some members of the Multilateral Church Conversation in Scotland may be currently experiencing a sense of *déjà vu*. This is because the Conversation has a Working Party on Central Issues that is currently considering matters that have been before the Conversation at earlier stages in its 15-year history.

The Central Issues group began its work in 1979 and quickly resolved that its business was to identify and distinguish between “two kinds of diversity”: (1) diversity that would not impoverish but enrich a united church and is therefore to be welcomed and encouraged, and (2) diversity that represents at present an insuperable stumbling block to unity.

In November 1980 the Working Party reported to the Conversation regarding diversity in the areas of authority, worship and the sacraments. The report observes that “it is on structures of authority that talks in Scotland have always broken down, but these have not proved insuperable barriers elsewhere. . . . We doubt whether the *ostensible* cause of breakdown is the *real* one, and are inclined to blame the ‘latent congregationalism’ by which all of our churches’ local loyalties supplant any vision of catholicity.”

Since the submission of this report, the Working Party has been strengthened by drawing in new members from the denominations. The group is presently concerned with studying closely those diversities so far identified. It is focusing its attention on the issue of baptism and its relation to confirmation and communion, with particular reference to the believers’ baptism/infant baptism controversy and to the question of second baptism.

In addition to its Working Party on Central Issues, the Conversation also has a small group with a remit to promote the Conversation’s guidelines for ecumenical parishes. These guidelines are contained in a document already given the general approval of the churches. The group largely works through local councils of churches or by personal contact. It is an advisory group but is prepared to take initiatives where openings are indicated.

Meanwhile, plans to unite the Congregational Union of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland, both participants in the Multilateral

Church Conversation, have been dropped. A poll of local congregations revealed that only (approximately) 50% of both churches were in favour of going ahead with preparations for a uniting church. This was not regarded as a sufficient mandate for proceeding with the negotiations.

Contact: Rev. John N. Wylie, 20 Cleeve Drive, Perth PH1 LHH.
(ER 1974, p. 319; 1976, p. 333; 1978, p. 247; 1980, pp. 302f.)

SOUTHERN AFRICA

CHURCH UNITY COMMISSION: CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA (ANGLICAN) — METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA — PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA — REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH — TSONGA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH — UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The third draft of the Proposed Covenant for the Recognition of Members and Ministers was accepted, in principle, by all the member churches of the Church Unity Commission (CUC) in the final months of 1980. It has now been remitted to the lower courts of the churches for study and comment. A final decision in regard to the acceptance of the Covenant will be made by the supreme courts of the churches in 1982.

The second draft of the Covenant was found unacceptable by the Provincial Synod of the Church of the Province of South Africa because of the bishops' conviction that "the appropriate form of recognition to be used in the [services of mutual recognition of ministries] would be the biblical and traditional laying on of hands with prayer". Since this theological perspective was not contained in the second draft, the Provincial Synod requested the Commission to organize a meeting between a delegation from the Synod of Bishops and representatives of the other negotiating churches "to give further consideration to the meaning of episcopacy in the scriptures and in the tradition of the church and to seek together to discern what God may be saying to the church about it today". This consultation on episcopacy, which was held in March of 1980, produced suggested revisions that were incorporated into the third draft of the Covenant. A statement on episcopacy has also been prepared by the Doctrine Committee of the CUC and commended to ministers and members for careful study.

If accepted, the Covenant would lead to mutual recognition of membership, ministry, and sacrament and would bind the participating churches to work together towards visible union, the spread of the gospel, and the realization of social justice. The Commission has undertaken to prepare a full Plan of Union which would be made available to the churches once (and if) the Covenant is officially accepted.

The racial situation in South Africa raises particular problems for the negotiating churches. The following paragraph on that subject comes from the CUC publication, *In Touch* (September 1981):

The minimal level of black participation in the work of the CUC makes it clear that the Commission is not where most black Christians are. As the process of fragmentation and polarisation gathers momentum in both church and

state, the CUC churches need to take seriously the meaning of mutual recognition for every area of our common life, and not limit it to the theological issues which dominate our discussions. . . . The church forgets this at its peril, particularly at a time when division is being encouraged and exploited for ideological and political ends. The church needs to manifest a unity of life, not just of word, which demonstrates in its fellowship that God can join together what man wants to keep apart.

Contact: Mr Joseph Wing, P.O. Box 31083, Braamfontein, Transvaal. (ER 1964, pp. 414ff.; 1966, p. 354; 1968, p. 271; 1970, pp. 256ff.; 1972, pp. 356ff.; 1974, pp. 309ff.; 1976, pp. 315ff.; 1978, pp. 235ff.; 1980, pp. 288f.)

SRI LANKA

CHURCH OF CEYLON (ANGLICAN DIOCESES OF COLOMBO AND KURUNAGALA OF THE PROVINCE OF INDIA, PAKISTAN AND CEYLON, NOW UNDER THE METROPOLITICAL OVERSIGHT OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY) — METHODIST CHURCH — CHURCHES AFFILIATED TO THE SRI LANKA BAPTIST SANGAMAYA — JAFFNA DIOCESE OF THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA — CHURCHES OF THE PRESBYTERY OF LANKA (PRESBYTERIAN)

The legal issues that have long delayed church union in Sri Lanka are gradually being resolved. In the only outstanding case, that of the Anglicans, the District Court of Colombo decreed in May 1980 that the resolutions of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese of Colombo to unite and to present a bill to Parliament had been duly passed. There is an appeal pending against this judgment and a petition has been filed to accelerate hearing of it.

In the meantime, the Consultative Conference of Heads of Churches and their Advisers, a group which has kept the church union issue alive, presented a resolution to the churches for their consideration which makes provisions for those who object to union. The resolution states that the five uniting churches

. . . decide to make provision in the Church of Sri Lanka which shall provide for any of our members to exercise their freedom of worship and practice thereof as existing at the date of Union and for any of our ministers to exercise their ministry of the word and sacrament as at the date of union and to receive their emoluments and other benefits including pensions on terms not less favourable than at the date of union while in active service in the Church of Sri Lanka or on retirement.

The Methodist Church last August rescinded a former resolution which sought a "new scheme" of union and passed the above resolution with an overwhelming majority. The Anglican Diocese of Kurunagala also passed it with an overwhelming majority last September. The Diocese of Jaffna and the Presbytery of Lanka should have no difficulty with the resolution since their decisions to unite were unanimous. (Following reconciliation between two factions of a local church, the Presbytery of Lanka met in April 1982 and agreed to participate actively once again in negotiations for church union.) The Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya and the Anglican Diocese of Colombo have yet to vote on it. The Bishop of Colombo is calling a

conference of clergy for May 1982, for study and discussion, and a conference of clergy and laity the following month, also for study and discussion, before a meeting of the Diocesan Council where a vote will be taken on the resolution. The Baptist Sangamaya is taking a similar approach with group meetings for study and discussion before taking a vote in Sangamaya (convention).

The Fourth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches in Colombo had a strong impact on the churches. The fact of having had some 43 of the delegates preach in local churches and meet church groups gave a touch of renewal to the cause of church unity in Sri Lanka.

Contact: The Ven. James L. H. Amerasekera, All Saints' Vicarage, Hultsdorp, Colombo 12.

(*ER* 1954, pp. 300-303; 1955, pp. 77ff.; 1957, p. 287; 1960, p. 236; 1962, pp. 358ff.; 1964, pp. 416ff.; 1966, p. 355; 1968, pp. 271ff.; 1970, pp. 257ff.; 1972, pp. 358ff.; 1974, pp. 312ff.; 1976, pp. 322ff.; 1978, pp. 240ff.; 1980, pp. 291ff.)

UNITED KINGDOM

RE-FORMED ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND — THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND WALES

As reported in the previous survey, following the failure of Churches of Christ to obtain the legally required majorities to implement the Proposals for Unification with the United Reformed Church (published in 1976), the Association of Churches of Christ was dissolved by a vote of the member congregations in order to allow the congregations to act in accord with their own convictions. In November 1979 a Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ was established consisting of those congregations which wished to unite with the United Reformed Church in England and Wales (URC). Negotiations for union were reopened with the URC, and in February 1980 the Revised Proposals for Unification were published. These were essentially the same as the 1976 Proposals, with alterations of certain details to take account of the new situation.

The Revised Proposals were approved by all 41 congregations of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ, many congregations voting unanimously in favour. In August 1980 they were approved *nem. con.* by the Annual Conference of the Re-formed Association. In May 1980 the General Assembly of the URC approved the Revised Proposals with one dissentient, and these were ratified by the Assembly in April 1981. In July 1981 the United Reformed Church Act received the Royal Assent after its passage through parliament (this being necessary to effect the legal changes required by the union). The Unifying Assembly was held in Birmingham on 26 September 1981 when the two communions were united to become the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom. The change of title denotes the fact that the former Churches of Christ congregations in Scotland give the URC representation in that country for the first time.

Under the terms of the Revised Proposals, the Basis of the URC was amended so as to hold together the convictions of those who believe in infant baptism and of those who believe only in believers' baptism. Both forms of baptism are to be available in each congregation. Former Churches of Christ elders, who were ordained to a local ministry of word and sacraments, were given the opportunity to become auxiliary ministers in the URC, and the majority of them have done so. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the union, however, is the question of relative size. The national membership of the URC in 1980 was about 150,000, while the corresponding figure for the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ was just over 2,300. The URC was prepared to make major alterations to its Basis for the sake of union with a much smaller church; and this enabled Churches of Christ to enter that union realizing that they were overwhelmingly outnumbered but still with confidence in the integrity of the united church which was created. The union has also shown the importance of trust and mutual commitment at all levels of the two churches' life — national, regional and local. The United Reformed Church enters this new stage of its life with a profound sense of thanksgiving to God.

Contact: Dr David M. Thompson, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge CB3 ODG.

(*ER* 1964, p. 431; 1966, pp. 371ff.; 1968, p. 282; 1970, p. 268; 1972, pp. 364ff.; 1974, pp. 316ff.; 1976, pp. 328ff.; 1978, pp. 244ff.; 1980, pp. 297ff.)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONSULTATION ON CHURCH UNION: AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH — AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH — CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) — CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH — EPISCOPAL CHURCH — NATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY CHURCHES — PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE US — UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST — UNITED METHODIST CHURCH — UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE USA

The 15th plenary session of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) was held in March 1982, in Louisville, Kentucky, almost exactly twenty years after COCU was constituted, in early 1962, at a meeting of four churches in Washington, DC.

The 1982 plenary represented a kind of watershed in the life of the Consultation; it was here that one era drew to a close and another began. This can be indicated in two major ways.

1. Three working groups of the Consultation finished their work and were discharged with thanks by the plenary in Louisville.
 - a) The Commission on Generating Communities and the Commission on Interim Eucharistic Fellowship had, since 1973, developed a series of pilot projects on worship and mission in various parts of the United

States. A special conference was convened in March 1981, to study the results emerging from these experimental communities. From this conference came a series of recommendations regarding unity at the local level, having to do both with shared worship and joint structures for mission. The learnings from these experiments will be used by COCU's Church Order Commission to evaluate the quality of unity at the local level in the future. A series of models, suggested by the Commission on Generating Communities, will be published late in 1982.

b) A Task Force of Persons with Disabilities, in existence since 1976, has produced a booklet entitled *God's Strength and Our Weakness*. The booklet contains models of dialogue and consciousness raising for local congregations on the question of "handicapism", a series of testimonies of persons with disabilities, a theological manifesto, and suggestions for Bible studies and sermons. This publication will be printed in large-point type and will be accompanied by a cassette tape for the visually impaired.

2. Four working groups which reported to the 15th plenary will continue in the next period.

a) The Women's Task Force, in cooperation with COCU's Commission on Worship, initiated a large consultation in the autumn of 1981 to examine the place of language in liturgy. This conference assembled educators, theologians, curriculum writers, hymnologists and students for a three-day study and discussion of the use and misuse of language as a conveyor or reality in worship. Insights arising from this conference will inform several dimensions of COCU's work in the next period. A report will be published in mid-1982.

b) The Commission on Worship has produced a complete new eucharistic liturgy which is available in leaflet form for use in the churches. The main focus of the commission's attention in the next period is the preparation of a liturgy for covenanting which will probably incorporate elements of the recognition of churches, the reconciliation of ministries, and commitment to growing common life of the churches.

c) The 1980 COCU plenary agreed on a final text of the Consultation's statement of emerging theological consensus, printed under the title *In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting*, and nine of COCU's member churches initiated study of the document. Official responses from these churches were received at the 15th plenary. COCU's Theology Commission will work between 1982 and 1984 to revise the emerging consensus in the light of these responses. Its work will be coordinated with the plans being developed in the Church Order Commission.

d) The Church Order Commission of the Consultation, constituted late in 1979, made its first report at the 1982 plenary meeting. This commission proposed that the plenary affirm a process of "covenanting" as the appropriate way ahead for the Consultation in the quest for visible unity in a church truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed.

The plenary agreed to this suggestion and instructed the Church Order Commission to prepare proposals for covenanting to be presented at COCU's next plenary. The following elements were suggested for development:

- mutual recognizing of our churches;
- claiming our emerging theological consensus;
- recognizing/reconciling our ministries;
- initiating regular eucharistic fellowship;
- exercising social and personal mission, including common mission in such areas as justice, peace and liberation;
- commissioning "apostolic collegia" (councils of oversight).

The commissioning of "apostolic collegia" is a new concept for COCU and one which generated a great deal of interest at the Louisville meeting. Such groups — at national, regional and local levels — composed of leaders from each church, would have the responsibility of overseeing the covenanting process in a variety of ways, including joint ordinations, confirmations and common mission.

The Rev. John Brandon, COCU's associate general secretary since 1977, resigned from the staff at the end of 1981 to return to a pastorate. His successor, Dr William Watley, an African Methodist Episcopal Church pastor and educator, was installed into the office at the 1982 plenary.

During the time included in this survey, COCU's general secretary, Gerald Moede, wrote a book entitled *Oneness in Christ: the Quest and the Questions*. This work, published by COCU, examines the wider ecumenical movement and the place of the Consultation within it. It is available from the Consultation office in Princeton, New Jersey.

Thus, in retrospect, it can be seen that the 15th plenary meeting of the Consultation began consideration of the two questions that will be central for its future: (1) How might COCU's growing theological agreement be "received" by the churches? (2) What might be the organic ligaments of its future body? Both of these are vital considerations for moving from consensus to commitment, an insight which emerged from the Sri Lanka Consultation of United and Uniting Churches.

The next plenary of the Consultation (to be held, in all probability, in late 1984) will discuss and submit a complete proposal for future steps to its member churches for their action during the years 1986-1988. Thus, the Consultation will enter a crucial period of its life in the years immediately ahead.

Contact: Dr Gerald F. Moede, Consultation on Church Union, 228 Alexander Street, Princeton, NJ 08540.

(*ER* 1962, pp. 377-379; 1964, pp. 438ff.; 1966, pp. 379ff.; 1968, pp. 288-290; 1970, p. 279; 1972, p. 370; 1974, p. 234 and pp. 323ff.; 1976, pp. 345ff.; 1978, pp. 255ff.; 1980, pp. 305ff.)

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) — THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

In 1979 the Disciples of Christ General Assembly and the United Church of Christ (UCC) General Synod approved a resolution calling for the two churches to covenant with each other and commit themselves to a journey of six years during which they would engage in common work and study on the themes of sacraments, ministry and mission. A national Steering Committee, composed of ten members from each denomination, has given leadership in designing a process which would involve the active participation and study of all areas in the life of both churches — congregations, middle judicatories, seminaries and national administrative and programme units — in this covenant “to embody God’s gift of oneness in Jesus Christ”.

During its first biennium (1980-1981), the Steering Committee concentrated its efforts on the tasks of resourcing and communicating the Covenant study process. Key elements have included the following:

1. Preparing a study packet which brings together resource materials on the meaning of covenant, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, ministry, mission and unity, along with a reader’s guide for group discussion.

2. Making contact with over 700 Disciples and UCC congregations from across the life of both churches to invite their participation in the study process, either as single denominational study groups or as “paired” groups involving at least one Disciples and one UCC congregation (640 congregations agreed to share in this church-wide study).

3. Launching a “Covenant Sunday” to be celebrated annually in January (1982-1985), which will highlight our covenant relationship by using jointly-prepared worship resources and suggesting shared congregational activities.

In looking to the next biennium (1982-1983), the Steering Committee will continue to nurture the work and study already begun. A second major task will be to assess the possibilities of a future life together. The Committee will need to address several basic questions facing our churches as it prepares to make a proposal in 1985 on whether or not to enter formal union negotiations. These questions are: Why is church union important? What difference would a union of our two churches make in our witness, mission and church life? Are there existing models of union which can inform our discussions? Can we envision an appropriate model of union for our two denominations? What is the relation of our union conversations to the wider ecumenical discussion, especially within the Consultation on Church Union? A paper from the Committee dealing with questions such as these will be shared widely throughout both churches during 1983 for discussion and response. This should assist the Steering Committee as it prepares to make its recommendation on formal union negotiations in 1985.

Two important agreements were reached by consensus by members of the Steering Committee at its March 1982 meeting, agreements which will

guide the work of the committee in the years ahead: first, that the pursuit of union is necessary for the sake of reconciliation of all humankind and the fulfilment of God's mission, and second, that it is necessary for our two churches to pursue the embodiment of the unity given to us in Jesus Christ as a part of the wider search for the visible unity of all Christ's church.

In several respects, this union conversation represents a new approach in the search for church union. It begins with the important recognition of our common calling as part of God's covenant with the church. During its first two years, the major emphasis has been upon involving the "grass-roots" participation of local study groups in congregations. In this way, it sees itself clearly as a contribution to the larger Consultation on Church Union. These elements will shape and guide all recommendations for the future.

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(ER 1976, p. 349; 1978, pp. 257f.; 1980, pp. 307f.)

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PRESBYTERIAN UNION: PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES — UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In April 1969, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the US adopted the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States invite the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to seek a plan for the reunion of the two churches.

The common heritage which we share in these United States, the unity of faith and life to which our Constitutions witness, and the necessity of a strong Christian mission in this nation and world, behove us to initiate plans for union.

Trusting the Holy Spirit, we reaffirm our readiness to be led into whatever forms of church life and work are revealed as God's will for us.

Therefore, we recommend that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States appoint a special committee of twelve persons and invite the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to appoint a committee of twelve persons to constitute a Joint Committee of Twenty-four:

1. To engage in joint conferences to study and explore areas of unity and diversity in our present faith and practice and ways in which the diversities that separate us may be overcome.

2. To encourage and intensify correspondence and discussions between our Boards and Agencies having responsibilities in the areas affecting the total life of our two denominations.

3. To report annually beginning in 1970 to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, US, and the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, USA.

4. To recommend further steps towards the reunion of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

This resolution is presented with prayer to God that the life and witness to Jesus Christ in these United States may be greatly strengthened by these considerations and eventual decisions.

The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, meeting later in that same year, responded affirmatively to this invitation,

and a Joint Committee on Presbyterian Union was promptly appointed by the moderators of the two Assemblies. For twelve years, the committee has worked at its assigned task “to seek a plan for the reunion of the two churches”. These churches were divided by the passions of the American Civil War in 1861, and have continued in separate but increasingly close relations for the past 120 years.

The Joint Committee on Presbyterian Union has submitted to the churches, over the intervening years, three draft plans of reunion (in 1971, in 1974, and in 1978), and each has been commended by both General Assemblies to their respective churches for study and response — that is, for criticism but not for vote. This deliberative process has now resulted in the publication in 1981 of a 288-page document entitled *The Plan for Reunion* on which the two churches will be asked to vote. This document consists of three parts: the Articles of Agreement, a new Book of Order for the reunited church, and a Brief Statement of Belief which is intended to serve provisionally until the reunited church is able to prepare its own contemporary Declaration of Faith. The Book of Order, which is the largest part of the entire document, is composed of three sections: the “Form of Government”, the “Rules of Discipline” and the “Directory for the Service of God” for the proposed reunited church.

The *Plan for Reunion* will be submitted to the General Assemblies of the two churches in June 1982, with recommendation for its approval. If approved by the General Assemblies (as appears likely), it will then be submitted to their respective presbyteries (of which there are 60 in the PCUS, and 152 in the UPCUSA) for ratification. Such ratification requires the consent of three-fourths of the presbyteries in the PCUS, and two-thirds of the presbyteries in the UPCUSA. Voting by the presbyteries will occur, for the most part, in early 1983. If ratified by the required number of presbyteries in both churches, the union will be formally enacted at a joint meeting of the two Assemblies in Atlanta, Georgia in June 1983. The name of the resulting reunited church will be: the Presbyterian Church (USA).

At the time of this writing, it is too early to anticipate with any accuracy the results of the voting that shall take place in the presbyteries. The PCUS, because it has the higher majority requirement of the two, is more uncertain of the outcome of the voting. The Joint Committee is cautiously optimistic, however, that the required majorities will be achieved in both churches, and that the union will be effected in 1983. To that end, much labour and prayer is being offered in both churches.

In the meantime, both churches continue their full participation in the Consultation of Church Union (COCU), in which they, together with eight other denominations, are seeking to form together, by the grace of God, a united church that will be at once “truly catholic, truly evangelical, truly reformed”. The two Presbyterian delegations in the Consultation have, for the past seven years, functioned as one, holding *all* of their denominational meetings in COCU as joint meetings of the PCUS/UPCUSA delegations.

Contact: The Office of Ecumenical Coordination, 341 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia 30365.

(*ER* 1978, pp. 258f.)

WALES

COMMISSION OF THE COVENANTED CHURCHES: THE CHURCH IN WALES (ANGLICAN) — THE METHODIST CHURCH — THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES — THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH — CERTAIN CHURCHES OF THE BAPTIST UNION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The period since the publication of the 1977-79 survey has brought four main developments for the Covenanted Churches in Wales.

1. In September 1980, a discussion document entitled *The Principles of Visible Unity in Wales* was published by the Commission. The churches were asked to study the document and to respond to the Commission by Easter 1982. It was hoped that such a process would enable agreement on basic principles for further growth towards a Uniting Church, would highlight particular issues which need further work, and would enable the churches "to discern the wealth of our diverse traditions and grow together in unity of faith, worship and mission".

All the churches have given detailed consideration to the document and there have also been many ecumenical discussions. The responses indicate considerable consensus on the general principles which are outlined, though there are clearly issues which need further work. In particular, the churches have welcomed the emphasis on a balance between formulations of the faith (recognizing both the significance and limitations of such formulations) and the freedom of the Spirit in leading the people of God to deeper perceptions of the truth in Christ. In this connection, the Church in Wales (Anglican) asks that further work be done on the role of the historic creeds.

The primary importance given to mission in the life of the Covenanted Churches' growth towards unity is welcomed, although some have felt that the attempt at brevity has resulted in a blandness which lacks urgency. The emphasis on the presentation of Christ and on the ministry to human need, as elements in the one great calling, is welcomed.

Chapter three on the "Nature of the Church" has raised two central issues for the churches. First, how can diversity in local congregations be held within the unity of the church? Second, how can the responsibility and freedom of the local congregation be seen as part of the essence of the church? Clearly, it will be necessary to outline ways of reconciling the rights enjoyed by local congregations with those of the whole church.

The responses to the chapter on membership have indicated different emphases. The Church in Wales asks the Commission to give further attention to the place of confirmation in the process of initiation, while other churches ask whether the emphasis on confirmation in some traditions is not "a hindrance to equality of church membership" and advocate greater emphasis on baptism and confession of faith. The attempt to hold together infant baptism and believers' baptism is generally welcomed.

Naturally, the chapter on "Ministry in the Church" has raised large questions (see the survey in *The Ecumenical Review*, July 1980), but there is general agreement on the proposal of a threefold ministry. The Commis-

sion is asked to consider further the role and ordination of women — in particular, whether ordination of women would be a precondition of participation in a Uniting Church. More work is also needed on the question of the diaconate.

The Commission will meet in July 1982 to draw up a programme for the further work called for by the churches during this discussion process. It is encouraging that there is, within the covenanted churches, a considerable consensus on the fundamentals of their life and mission and an eagerness to clarify the issues outlined above.

2. In September 1981, the Commission published a booklet entitled *The Holy Communion*. This order of service, which is intended for use on joint occasions, has been approved and welcomed by all the covenanted churches. Its publication (in bilingual form) marks a significant step forward both in theological and liturgical agreement. It is already being widely used in Wales and has enabled local congregations to understand the centrality of common worship in their growth towards unity. It is encouraging that some churches (including some non-covenanted churches) have begun to use this order of service not only on ecumenical occasions but as part of their regular congregational life. Such widespread use will make this holy communion truly a focus for the common life of the churches.

3. One important consequence of the Commission's *Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Projects* has been the regular meeting of church leaders in many areas to consider their joint use of buildings, etc., and to discuss ways in which joint pastorates and local ecumenical projects can be encouraged locally. These church leaders' meetings have given new impetus to the work of the Area Planning Committees in some areas, and this dual pattern seems to be a helpful basis for developing joint action within the covenant between local congregations.

4. Finally, the Commission has considered the implications for Wales of an agreement on a Covenant between churches in England. The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church would be affected by both covenants. A joint meeting was held between representatives of the Churches' Council for Covenanting in England and the Commission of the Covenanted Churches which made recommendations to these bodies and to the churches about the future inter-relationship of the two covenants. These included suggestions that a realignment of ecclesiastical boundaries be undertaken to avoid any subsequent complexities in relationships, that consultations be initiated between the Church in Wales (Anglican) and the Church of England to discuss common concerns and steps in relation to the recognition and licensing of ministries, and that both Commission and Council consider ways in which joint decision making can be encouraged at all levels. In this debate the British Council of Churches' work on united churches in the four nations of Britain will be of great significance.

This joint meeting, and the churches' responses to *The Principles of Visible Unity in Wales*, have raised the issues of the mutual recognition of ministries (which is not part of the Welsh Covenant but which will come into

effect in England if that Covenant is enacted). The Commission will need to consider the appropriateness of seeking mutual recognition of ministries within the Covenanted Churches in Wales as an intermediate step between the present Covenant and the anticipated Uniting Church in Wales. This discussion must be an element in the task which is now called for: namely, outlining "the steps to be taken to bring about visible unity especially in relation to the ministry and to the governing structures of the churches".

The next two years will involve a search for consensus on outstanding issues listed above, and the development of an outline of the steps to be taken in the future so that further proposals may be placed before the churches. Throughout this process, it will be vital that such national advances keep pace with local growth in cooperation, joint ministry and mission. The educational task will, therefore, continue to have priority.

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(*ER* 1966, p. 371; 1968, p. 281; 1970, pp. 271ff.; 1972, pp. 366ff.; see also "Covenanting for Union in Wales" by Paul Ballard, in *Study Encounter*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 1973, SE/37, pp. 11ff.; *ER* 1974, p. 320; 1976, pp. 335ff.; 1978, pp. 249ff.; 1980, pp. 303ff.)